

impression that he has endorsed all of these increases to the VA budget. In fact, the President has requested only about a 25 percent increase in appropriated funding over 5 years; the remainder has come from funding added by Congress and from increased collections of copayments from veterans.

Keep in mind that during the same period, the number of veterans entering the VA health care system grew by almost 50 percent. Additionally, medical inflation (which VA forecast at five percent per year) increased by seven to eight percent per year. The total average annual increases of eight percent over the five budget cycles in question still have required VA to take dramatic action to continue to deliver health care services to veterans. In addition to halting enrollment for tens of thousands of veterans with incomes as low as \$25,000 who might not be able to afford private health insurance, VA has proposed elimination of nursing home care for all but the most severely service-disabled veterans.

Moreover, the President has actually opposed Congressional efforts to add funds to the VA health care system. On July 26, 2002, Congress authorized \$275 million to address the costs of caring for VA's higher priority groups—service-connected and low-income veterans and those in need of specialized services. The President failed to designate these funds as emergency spending pursuant to the Balanced Budget Act, so the additional resources Congress sought to provide, which would have remained available to the agency throughout fiscal year 2003, were sacrificed.

The Bush Administration also objected to Congressional attempts to add \$1.3 billion for veterans' health care in the FY 2004 Emergency Supplemental for Iraq and Afghanistan Security and Reconstruction Bill. Joshua Bolten, Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) wrote to House and Senate appropriators on October 21, 2003: "The Administration strongly opposes these provisions that would allocate an additional \$1.3 billion for VA medical care . . ."

A second Bush term would likely create an even more difficult funding environment for veterans' programs. OMB guidance leaked to the Washington Post this spring indicated that, for fiscal year 2006, the White House would require VA to identify \$910 million to cut from its fiscal year 2005 budget request for discretionary programs—primarily, medical care, construction, and research.

The President also told the VFW: "We've reduced the large backlog of disability claims by about a third; we will reduce it even further."

Again, not so and not likely. When President Bush assumed office in January 2001, 278,334 veterans' disability claims were awaiting a VA rating decision. As of August 21, 2004, there were 330,380 disability claims awaiting a rating decision. The one-third reduction claimed by President Bush is not supported by VA's own data.

I am concerned that the Bush Administration's emphasis on productivity as a goal in itself, has actually been harmful to veterans. Veterans need a timely accurate decision when they apply for benefits. In an effort to meet production goals, I have found veterans rated on the basis of inadequate medical examinations which do not fully address the impact of a veteran's disability on his or her abil-

ity to function. It is tempting for well-meaning VA employees under pressure to reduce the backlog to decide the claim rather than sending the examination back to correct the deficiencies.

One measure of accuracy is the marked increase in veterans' claims pending at the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). When President Bush assumed office, 87,291 appeals were pending. As of August 14, 2004, there were 149,222 appeals pending. With increasing frequency, BVA continues to send claims back for evidence which should have been obtained before the claim was decided.

The prospect for the future is even worse. Despite increasing numbers of claims for service-connected compensation from the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as past conflicts, the Bush Administration fiscal year 2005 budget calls for 289 fewer full-time employees to handle disability compensation claims than were on the rolls in 2003. Cutting employees who decide these claims at a time when the number and complexity of claims is increasing does a great disservice to veterans.

The misdirection in the President's speech continued: "For more than a century, federal law prohibited disabled veterans from receiving both their military retired pay and their VA disability compensation. Combat-injured and severely disabled veterans deserve better. I was proud to be the first President in over 100 years to sign concurrent receipt legislation."

Considering his threats to veto it, his party's vehement objections to it, and the behind-closed-doors Republican "compromise" that excludes two-thirds of those eligible and forces the rest to wait 10 years to receive full benefits, "proud" seems an odd choice of words.

"We're getting the job done in Washington, D.C.," said the President to the VFW. Earlier this year, VFW then-Commander-in-Chief Edward S. Banas, Sr., gave his own assessment: "The President ignored veterans in the State of the Union Address and with [the] release of his 2005 budget, it is further evident that veterans are no longer a priority with this administration . . . the American people will not tolerate this shoddy treatment of America's veterans, especially at a time of war."

RECOGNITION OF MICHAEL F. CANTWELL IN HONOR OF HIS RETIREMENT

HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR.

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 23, 2004

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an individual who I am fortunate enough to call a dear friend, Mr. Michael Cantwell. Mike, who started his career as an Apprentice Steamfitter in 1960, will be retiring this week, leaving behind a legacy of public service and dedication to working families throughout the great State of New Jersey.

As a longtime union member and leader, Mike has tirelessly devoted his efforts and time to countless State, county and municipal organizations. For the past 44 years, he has served proudly, as a member of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, Locals 236 and 9. Currently, he serves as Local 9's business manager, financial sec-

retary-treasurer. As a staunch supporter of worker's rights and active union member and leader, Mike currently serves as the vice president of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO and the New Jersey State Building and Construction Trades Council. He is also a member of the New Jersey Joint Labor-Management Committee and the New Jersey Alliance for Action.

In addition, Mike is president of the New Jersey State Association of Pipe Trades, and the Mechanical Trades Council of New Jersey. He also chairs the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union No. 9 Joint Apprenticeship Committee, as well as the Trustees of the Education Fund—UA/Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Contractors Association of New Jersey.

For the past 17 years, Mike has proudly served on the Mercer County vocational Technical School Board, and his civic responsibilities also include his service on the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission Executive Committee and the Mercer County Planning Board.

An avid golfer, and proud father of 4, Michael, Lee, Barbara and Patrick, and grandfather to Luke and Eric, Mike has been married to his wife Lynne for the past 44 years. A true friend, and ardent supporter, Mike has been invaluable to my reelection efforts over the years. I have profound admiration and respect for Mike, and I am certain that his best years have yet to come. I wish Mike and his family the best that retirement has to offer and I extend my heartfelt praise and gratitude for all that he has done.

VIDEO VOYEURISM PREVENTION ACT OF 2003

SPEECH OF

HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 21, 2004

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my strong support for passage of S. 1301, the Video Voyeurism Prevention Act. I wish to thank Chairman OXLEY, Senator DEWINE, Senator SCHUMER, as well as Chairman SENSENBRENNER and Ranking Member CONYERS for their work on this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately video voyeurism has become a rapidly growing national problem. With the development of the Internet and miniature camera technology, anybody can now readily invade the privacy of another by secretly videotaping or photographing others and putting those compromising images on the Internet. We all regularly see pop up advertisements on the Internet for new miniature camera technology. Undoubtedly this technology is being used by many "Peeping Toms" to spy on others. It is time that Congress takes a stand against the growing misuse of these new technologies.

S. 1301, the Video Voyeurism Act makes it illegal for anyone on federal property to capture an improper image of another under circumstances that clearly violates the privacy of that individual. It is my hope that this legislation will spur individual states to follow suit and update their criminal codes to ensure that their citizens are similarly protected from video voyeurism in areas under state jurisdiction.